

April is Alcohol Awareness Month

Alcohol Awareness Month is a nationwide campaign intended to raise awareness of the health and social problems excessive alcohol consumption can cause, not only for individuals, but their families, friends, and communities as well. According to the United States Preventive Services Task Force (2004), alcohol misuse includes risky/hazardous and harmful drinking which place individuals at risk for future problems. Harmful drinking describes those persons currently experiencing physical, social or psychological harm from alcohol use, but who do not meet criteria for dependence. Alcohol can interact with certain medications, impair a person's ability to engage in activities that require attention, skill, or coordination (e.g., driving), exacerbate a medical condition (e.g., gastritis), and overtime alcohol misuse can lead to cancer, liver disease, and heart problems. More than 18 million American men and women suffer from alcohol-use disorders— there are countless millions of individuals, family members and children who experience the devastating effects of the alcohol problem of someone in their life.

The good news is Medicare now provides coverage for *Screening and Behavioral Counseling Interventions in Primary Care to Reduce Alcohol Misuse* for eligible beneficiaries who, if determined by a primary care physician or other primary care practitioner, may need help in reducing or abstaining from alcohol consumption.

Medicare provides coverage for annual alcohol screening, and for those that screen positive, up to four brief, face-to-face, behavioral counseling interventions per year for Medicare beneficiaries, including pregnant women:

- Who misuse alcohol, but whose levels or patterns of alcohol consumption do not meet criteria for alcohol dependence (defined as at least three of the following: tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, impaired control, preoccupation with acquisition and/or use, persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to quit, sustains social, occupational, or recreational disability, use continues despite adverse consequences); and
- Who are competent and alert at the time that counseling is provided; and,
- Whose counseling is furnished by qualified primary care physicians or other primary care practitioners in a primary care setting.

For More Information:

- [National Coverage Determination \(NCD\) for Screening and Behavioral Counseling Interventions in Primary Care to Reduce Alcohol Misuse](#)
- [The ABCs of Providing the Initial Preventive Physical Examination \(IPPE, or “Welcome to Medicare” visit\) Quick Reference Chart](#)
- [The ABCs of Providing the Medicare Annual Wellness Visit \(AWV\) Quick Reference Chart](#)
- [The MLN Preventive Services Educational Products Webpage](#)
- [Substance \(Other Than Tobacco\) Abuse Structured Assessment and Brief Intervention \(SBIRT\) Services fact sheet](#)
- [CDC Alcohol Awareness Month website](#)
- [National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. website](#)

Thank you for joining CMS in raising awareness of the negative effects of alcohol use on one's health and personal life, and associated risk factors and related preventive benefits covered by Medicare.